

Distillation of Labor Commodities: Human and extrahuman materiality

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Abstract

*Whether describing the distillation of labor into commodities or the representation of affect through objects, Kenneth Burke attends to the interlaced agencies of people and things. This essay locates such convergences in Icnar Bollann's film *Even the Rain*, uncovering forms of politically-charged consubstantiality between human and extrahuman materiality. An awareness of what Burke calls "ambiguities of substance" gives viewers a way to interpret the movie's linkage of imperialism and "thing rhetoric" across five centuries.*

Introduction

Whether describing the distillation of human labor into commodities or the representation of affect through objects, Kenneth Burke regularly attends to the interlaced agencies of people and their surroundings, anticipating Bruno Latour's claim that "things do not exist without being full of people.¹ This essay locates such lively objects in contemporary cinema, uncovering varied forms of identification between human and extrahuman materiality and thus building on scholarship that links Burkean theories of consubstantiality to the rhetoric of film (Blakesley; Oktay; Perez). The argument concentrates especially on Icnar Bollann's *Even the Rain* (2010), a Spanish film that depicts the troubled production of a movie about Christopher Columbus's arrival in the so-called new world. Bollann's picture depicts a fictional shoot in Cochabamba, where the crew draws on lush settings and an eager cohort of inexpensive extras to evoke the historical period without recourse to computer-generated imagery. The attractions of the location fade, however, as many of the actors become embroiled in protests over the city's water policies. As early skirmishes escalate into a full-scale water war, the same director/character who lauds indigenous opposition to

the Spanish occupation comes to subordinate present-day protests to his artistic vision. Deriving in part from Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, *Even the Rain* establishes relations of identification between gold, water, and film so as to connect modes of imperial violence across more than five centuries.² Bollann both condemns that violence and undermines any sense of safe, critical distance from it, for even as she distinguishes her methods from those of her invented filmmakers, her metafilm calls attention to its own set location, its own dependence on the labor of underpaid extras, its own consubstantiality with the object of critique.

To note likenesses between working conditions on the set of *Even the Rain* and the conditions the movie dramatizes is to evoke what Burke calls "ambiguities of substance. The word substance may "designate what a thing is, he writes in *A Grammar of Motives*, but it "derives from a word designating something that a thing is not [...] Or otherwise put: the word in its etymological origins would refer to an attribute of the thing's context, since that which supports or underlies a thing would be a part of the thing's context (23). To describe the substance of a phenomenon is to deal, as Burke so often does, with the interdependencies of distinction and concurrence, singularity and situational entanglement. Bollann and her fictitious director Sebastibn may be substantially joined in their cinematic renunciations of Columbus's conquest, but their shared substance does not imply sameness. She distances herself from the character, after all, by juxtaposing his resounding affirmation of sixteenth-century indigenous resistance with his more limited concern for immediate public demonstrations in Cochabamba. Sebastibn's movie exists both inside and outside Bollann's, ambiguously serving as the guts of her production and the thing it defines itself against.

Attention to ambiguities of substance, while illuminating the relation between the metafilm and its nested counterpart, gives viewers a way to understand *Even the Rain*'s articulation of contested material phenomena across vast historical terrain. The coming argument establishes intertextual connections between *A Grammar of Motives*, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, and Gilberto Perez's "Toward a Rhetoric of Film: Identification and the Spectator, each of which addresses relations of consubstantiality not just between retors and audiences but between characters and the nonliving things that populate the narrative frame. The essay then describes identifications between the things themselves, showing how those correspondences condense and intensify the argument of the text they inhabit. To posit "correspondence between a prized, terror-infused substance in the Age of Discovery, the substance of the water wars, and the substance of their cinematic repre-

sentation honors the Burkean idea of ambiguity, implying likeness without unity and hinting at dialogic connections between extra human phenomena. Such linkages, while distinct from those outlined by Burke and Perez, come to us similarly permeated by the social character of rhetorical exchange, and they remain every bit as grounded in living negotiation and struggle, compromise and conflict.

Cogent as is the film's association of substances across time, such associations nevertheless risk undercutting audience identification with the picture's political project. With such risks in mind, the argument concludes by addressing the objection that the contexts are too divergent, too particular and nuanced, to allow for parallels. Such evaluations have a degree of validity, though they tend to interpret the conceptual overlap between substances as too perfect rather than partial and ambiguous. Critical emphasis on the movie's purported contrivances deemphasizes its self-consciousness, for at the very moment the text most powerfully fuses the narratives of Columbus's brutality, the water wars, and the exploitation of film-workers, Bollann calls attention to *Even the Rain* as a dream structure—and one that courts hypocrisy by under compensating indigenous workers even as it censures such practices. As Isabel Santaolalla implies in *The Cinema of Icnar Bollann*, and as the director herself attests, the question of how properly to compensate those workers remains unanswered. Although Bollann claims that her crew showed more labor consciousness than her fictional producer, she expresses concern about the formation of onset classes and the difficulty of avoiding them (DP/30). If her imagined filmmakers constituted straightforward scapegoats, viewers could leave the experience feeling cleansed of the bad faith the film portrays. But *Even the Rain* provides no such comfort, insinuating instead the audience's complicity with the modes of power displayed onscreen. Visceral reaction to that insinuation may explain the initial impulse to resist the film, to seek sure division from a thing that identifies itself with us.

The Heavens Weep: Thing Rhetoric

However persistently we posit clear divisions between human subjects and the object-context we inhabit, seemingly inert phenomena often express dynamic consubstantiality with human labor and social interplay. Burke addresses such consubstantiality while reflecting on the ethics of Karl Marx's historical materialism, contending that

precisely where Marxism is most often damned as *materialistic*, is precisely where it is most characteristically idealistic. Marx's most imaginative criticism is directed against the false idealism derived from the con-

cealed protection of materialistic interests. His chapter on “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof, shows how the human personality itself comes to be conceived in the abstract terms of impersonal commodities. And the whole purpose of such materialist criticism is to bring about such material conditions as are thought capable of releasing men from their false bondage to materials. (*Grammar* 214)

Burke suggests that where Marx demonstrates the identification of life with profit-generating mechanism, he engages in resolutely ethical inquiry, discrediting the logic of Capitalism by describing its operations in systematic, “materialistic fashion. *Capital* details a system wherein those who purportedly control the means of production become dependent on those means, and those who labor for the overclass find themselves fastened to—worse yet, reduced to—machinery. In Burke’s view, materialist criticism aims to disrupt these modes of consubstantiality by investigating their historical concealment.

Such criticism concentrates not just on the treatment of wage earners as objects but also on the identification of their labor with the commodity-form. Framing commoditization as a type of identification requires recognizing what Yakut Oktay describes as the “flexibility of Burke’s theory, its capacity to illuminate rhetorical transactions that transpire not only in words but also “beyond language (*KB Journal*). Those transactions occur through the reutilized, profit-driven motions of bodies as much as through verbal discourse or deliberate acts of persuasion. The commodity at once concretizes labor’s output and represents the expropriation of that output from the subjects who produce it. Barry L. Padgett calls this expropriation “the alienation of the laborer into the product (7). The estranged object expresses consubstantiality with its maker, simultaneously embodying the worker’s creative vitality and marking a separation from it. Hardly just a signal of individualized alienation, however, objectified labor condenses what Harry Cleaver calls “a set of power relations that pervades social experience under Capitalism (83). Those relations involve an apparent interdependence between subjects who control the means of production and subjects who activate those means—a perceived co-reliance accompanied by various historical antipathies, most prominently between managers and employees but also amid the strata of the rank-and-file. When *A Grammar of Motives* addresses the commodification of workers themselves, it contests forms of calcified value that are shot through with those modes of antipathy, and it defies the “set of power relations that systematic self-estrangement helps to sustain.

Whereas *Grammar* briefly addresses the transfiguration of people and social processes into commodities, *A Rhetoric of Motives* addresses the identification of people and things by examining how affect installs itself in the material surround. To illustrate such identification he imagines a novelist who, “ending on the death of his heroine, might picture the hero walking silently in the rain. No weeping here. Rather stark ‘understatement.’ Or look again, and do you not find that the very heavens are weeping in his behalf? (326). However prosaic the homology between setting and a character’s action, Burke memorably identifies the animate with the inanimate, carrying forward from *Grammar* the idea of a scene-act ratio. The scene constitutes an appropriate backdrop for human action just as the act finds expression through its surroundings. If we accept the (con)fusion of scene and act without recognizing it as one, the acceptance likely stems from our recurrent exposure to—and concomitant identification with—the conventional metonymies of popular fiction, whether novelistic or cinematic.

Inventive filmmakers sometimes rely on these metonymies to unsettle viewers’ long-held assumptions. In “Toward a Rhetoric of Film” Perez locates such techniques in the films of Carl Theodor Dreyer, who gives viewers false comfort by associating characters with the fecundity of their surroundings. “Young lovers are shown walking in a meadow,” writes Perez, “with flowers around them, trees, a sunny sky with a few puffy white clouds, maybe a river softly flowing in the distance. This is of course a romantic cliché. The young lovers are being identified with nature. In Dreyer’s *Day of Wrath* (1943), the sanguine coding of nature soon gives way to tones of reproof, as the film introduces attitudes that prevailed centuries before:

Set in seventeenth-century Denmark, the film takes us back into a Lutheran society that looked upon nature as dangerously pagan, a realm where witches roam and the devil lurks. We heirs of romanticism may admire and embrace nature, but those Lutherans would keep it at arm’s length. Set in seventeenth-century Denmark but of course aimed at us who take a different view, *Day of Wrath* does not make it easy for us to decide (as Arthur Miller does in *The Crucible*) that we are right and they were wrong. Dreyer has cunningly, unsettlingly constructed his film around the split between these two different rhetorics of nature, these two different ideologies.

Although Dreyer’s audience might interpret the narrative as validating modern perspectives, Perez finds only ambivalence in the structure of the picture, which gradually shows the “natural lovers to be engaged in acts of betrayal and incest. When viewers identify with those figures early in the

movie, they bring their social and historical contexts into conversation with those of the characters and the filmmakers, with results that are never certain and at times deeply disconcerting. Whatever the effects, to watch the production of consubstantiality between agents and scenes, persons and things, involves a concomitant overlap between the contexts of dieresis and reception, all of which occasionally feels more like a violent collision than a relaxed integration.

Perez locates just such a collision in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), which presents audiences with a psychological portrait so intimate as to be claustrophobic, hailing us as sympathetic spectators while repeatedly throwing our sympathies into question. The patterned alternation of affinity and disgust exemplifies a Burkean ambiguity of substance, as the film produces outraged repulsion in the very attempt to establish relations of commonality between viewer and anti-hero. For Perez, this pattern helps clarify distinctions between identification and what Murray Smith calls "alignment and "allegiance. Alignment "describes the process by which spectators are placed in relation to characters in terms of access to their actions and to what they know and feel, while allegiance signifies "approval, taking sides with the character in a moral sense, rooting for the hero against the villain.³ Whereas Smith believes that the term "identification typically conflates alignment and allegiance, and wishes to replace that broad analytical category with more exacting concepts, Perez attributes to identification meanings that alignment and allegiance cannot encompass. Of *Taxi Driver* he writes that

even though we don't approve [of Travis Bickle], even though we don't even like him, do we not in some significant way *identify* with him? How else to explain our response to that scene [...] in which Travis, having succeeded in getting Cybill Shepherd to go out with him, chooses to take her to a porno movie? We feel acute embarrassment. This may not be exactly what he feels, but surely we wouldn't be feeling it if we weren't putting ourselves in his place. We don't want to be in his place, we want to get out of there, but the film leaves us no choice, and it derives its peculiar impact from the way it puts us there. ("Toward)

That impact depends in part on similarities in diegetic context and context of reception. Many viewers feel the embarrassment that Travis would feel were he better attuned to his rhetorical situation, because we have been interpellated by social and sexual conventions he manages to miss. More salient still, we cringe also at how the scene identifies Travis with a particular kind of material culture, as manifest in the "blue movie

house as well as the glimpses and muffled sounds of the offending film. Betsy bolts for the door not just in response to Travis's violation of social expectation, but because the film comes immediately to stand for his intentions toward her, regardless of whether he would claim those intentions himself. Just as Dreyer's lovers become linked to nature in *Day of Wrath*, Bickle becomes identified with his surroundings in ways not easy to escape, no matter his readiness to apologize or eagerness to try another approach. In an ironic turn that contradicts his longing for a "real rain to cleanse New York of its seedier element, the mise-en-scene of Travis's failed date embodies the same vice he wishes to eliminate.

Whether figuring mise-en-scene in terms of a scene-act ratio—"the heavens weep—or tracking the objectification of labor in the realm of economic production, Burke's theorization of rhetoric involves regular consideration of dialogic relations between the human and extrahuman. What we encounter less frequently in Burke's work, and what will prove key to our analysis of *Even the Rain*, is consubstantiality among nonliving objects in the diegesis. Throughout Bollann's film, certain of those objects express hierarchical relations maintained by violence, the threat of violence, or what amounts to the same thing, the threat of resource withdrawal. Various people in *Even the Rain* passionately decry one type of violence while performing another, giving the audience few characters with whom to safely ally themselves. Even if those audiences identify at first with what Burke terms the "orientation of key figures (*Permanence* 21), we may balk when a wider view of those figures' social and material circumstances contradicts their previously clear-cut politics. Such contradictions arise with frequency as the film frames multiple, shifting perspectives including those of the fictional producer and director, the indigenous actors and those who hail from outside Cochabamba, the documentarian who covers the making of the biopic, the fictional Arawaks, as well as Columbus and his crew. Those perspectives all involve an orientation toward one or more of *Even the Rain*'s focal substances, though the movie generally destabilizes the audience's allegiance to any single standpoint. Once we identify with the critique of one object and its concomitant social relations, we subsequently find ourselves identified with another, similarly vexed object. The consubstantiality of objects in *Even the Rain* draws viewers into a process of what Perez describes as "comparative ideology, a juxtaposition of contexts wherein we fuse historical analysis with critical self-consciousness, and in which we stand implicated by Gael García Bernal's reflection on the film: "In Latin America this is nothing new. This is where we come from. This New World

emerged from terrible violence and ambition, which led to what we have now (Santaolalla 202).

To suggest that Columbus's conquests gave way to contemporary forms of social violence, or that present-day expressions of corporate empire are "nothing new, does not entail an equation of disparate historical periods. The substantial linkage of power-laden objects—and here we should remember Burke's idea of substance as ambiguous, as evoking both the object and its exterior—Involves acknowledging their difference as well as their likeness. Honoring such ambiguity, the next section details correspondences between objects in three different scenes: first, it describes a segment of Sebastibn's film in which the Spanish occupiers force indigenous people to pan for gold as a tax to the crown, and it focuses on the water-drenched quality of the ensuing drama; the section then addresses scenes immediately before and after the panning sequence—one in which the fictional producer Costa depicts his extras as inexpensive materials and another in which Antun, the actor who plays Columbus, alerts one of the indigenous actors to the division of labor that makes the movie possible. In specifying sometimes overt and at other times quiet correspondences between substances, the scenes set up a met cinematic dialogue between histories of "terrible violence and ambition, accentuating not their interchangeability but their resemblance. By joining a chain of objects to a chain of social histories, the film shares Burke's interest in the mutual elucidation of people and things.

Corresponding Substances

A key scene in Sebastibn's nested film begins with Columbus's "Indians immersed in water, panning for gold. The camera shifts to a lineup of indigenous people positioned just off the riverbank, presenting small lockets of gold dust to agents of the Spanish crown. The agents evaluate each offering, and if one does not meet the expected weight, they send its purveyor into the forest to be clipped. Soldiers wrestle the convicted through a rushing stream on their way to the punishing grounds. The lens tightens focus, bringing into view the worried expression of a girl as she reaches the front of the line. Her father, who stands beside her, finds himself quickly caught up in a confused debate over whether his offering achieves the standard. The Spanish agents decide that the locket is slightly under weight, and so apprehend him for discipline. The girl pleads for mercy as they drag her father toward the woods. Columbus arrives on horseback as her cries reach frantic pitch, and he gazes on the bloodstained block reserved for the day's tax evaders. The men turn to him for instruction; he nods. We see the

father's arm laid out on the block, the fall of the ax. We hear his agony as the camera locks on his daughter's face.



Figure 1. Spanish soldiers and a convicted Arawak splash through water on their way to the clipping grounds. Copyright Morena Films, 2010.

The scene entails a variation on Zinn's People's History, which attributes similar circumstances to Columbus's second expedition, in which his crew enslaved people from various Caribbean islands and made concentrated efforts to gather gold in Haiti. Intent on paying back the investors who financed the "seventeen ships and more than twelve hundred men he brought with him, Columbus established an efficient way to motivate his workers:

In the province of Cicao on Haiti, where he and his men imagined huge gold fields to exist, they ordered all persons fourteen years or older to collect a certain quantity of gold every three months. When they brought it, they were given copper tokens to hang around their necks. Indians found without a copper token had their hands cut off and bled to death. (Zinn 4)

The trinket that designates forced compliance in Zinn's history becomes the locket in *Even the Rain*, the vessel that contains the ritual offering. Whether designated via a copper ornament or gathered in a locket, the gold remains soaked in a specific set of social relations marked by national sponsorship of theft, slavery, and wholesale slaughter of native populations, much of it undertaken in the name of Christian progress. Burkean thought holds relevance to that history insofar as he tracks the dense accumulation of meanings in the extrahuman; to use Thomas Rickert's formulation in *Ambient Rhetoric*, Burke "advocates seeing how social drama plays through material things (208). Although Rickert resists the symbol-using subject/inanimate object dichotomy that often informs Burke's considerations of thing-rhetoric, the idea that motive and orientation inhere in objects

and environments rather than individual psychology constitutes a valuable advance in theorizing communicative ecology. Zinn's book and Bollann's movie work in slightly different ways not just to dramatize the rapacious pursuit of a fetishized substance, but to accentuate how that substance both mediates and becomes sodden with the social drama that "plays through it.

As *Even the Rain* examines that drama, the "extras who perform in Sebastibn's production find their own natural resources appropriated by outsiders claiming interest in local progress. Although Sebastibn regards the extras' troubles as insignificant by comparison to the Columbus story, the prominence of water in the lineup scene connotes its correspondence with the gold of past epochs. His obsessively focused orientation renders him insensitive to that correspondence, but the interplay of metafilm and interior film brings the identification of substances powerfully into view—or, to make further use of the Burkean lexicon, as audiences perceive the shifting "circumference of Sebastibn's project from a recreated, conflict-ridden Haiti to the immediate violence occurring near the film-shoot, *Even the Rain* invites us to compare the substances that motivate the distinct struggles, and to critique the fictional director's hesitancy to do so.⁴ Once early sequences in *Even the Rain* alert audiences to the privatization of water in Cochabamba, we bring that awareness to later depictions of Discovery-era violence: indigenous people panning for gold in a flowing stream, and the raucous splashing that attends the journey to the chopping block, strengthen the film's already pronounced connection between Zinn's "history from below and more contemporary forms of exploitation.

Those forms of exploitation in *Even the Rain* have their corollary in the actual Bolivian water wars, which occurred a decade before the release of Bollann's picture. Fabrizio Cilento explains that in the late 1990s, Bolivia entered into an agreement with the Bechtel-supported *Aguas del Tunari*, which generated "a 300% rise in consumer charges and forced many people to spend "one-third of their income on water (248). The price increases, along with resentment that a necessary public utility—even the rain—could be so shamelessly commodified, led to an uprising devoted to nullifying the contract. The protests built on previously established resistance to Bolivia's Law 2029, a statute that affords external organizations rights to supply water "to centers of population with more than 10,000 inhabitants while demanding that "local organizations such as cooperatives or neighborhood associations respect those agreements (Assies 17). When people refused to forgo their communal wells or subjugate the ritual value of water to its exchange-value, *Aguas del Tunari* manager Geoffrey Thorpe threatened to cut

off the supply to all who would not pay (24). Outraged citizens soon occupied the Plaza and set up blockades, engaging in confrontations with troops intent on quelling the protest.⁵ As the events drew international attention, the Bolivian government felt increased pressure to reconsider Law 2029 as well as the troubled corporate contract. The protests resulted in a series of government concessions that included the voiding of the *Aguas del Tunari* agreement, revisions to Law 2029, release of imprisoned dissenters, and financial remuneration for the wounded as well as the families of the slain (Assies 30).

By situating the Columbus biopic amid such turmoil, and accentuating the watery motif of key scenes, Bollann establishes historical juxtapositions akin to Perez's "comparative ideology. As the comparison unfolds, the correspondence between gold and water proves to be at once startlingly apt and necessarily imperfect. Cilento praises *Even the Rain*'s "confluence of temporalities, contending that the "short circuits between historical periods imply a charged connection between "colonialism (what went wrong) and "neocolonialism (what is wrong) (247). In both periods, powerful emissaries appropriate the resources of the local community, exacting payment from the indigenous people in the form of labor or money. Justifying their actions as tending toward native betterment, the emissaries impose an idea of socioeconomic order first through the violence of hegemony and then through physical terror. The "terrible violence and ambition of the early era, to return to Bernal's observation, prefigure "what we have now.

Still, those who recognize how gold and water correspond in the film will note significant dissimilarities as well. The process of identification, as Burke insists, presumes a state of difference. In "A Note on the Writing of *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Michael Feehan maintains that

Burke's identification differs from some psychological theories of identification in rejecting the idea that identification involves a merger so complete that the separate identities dissolve into one. Burke's identification reaches toward consubstantiality not transubstantiality. (*K. B. Journal*)

However evocative of earlier modes of oppression, the Cochabamba water wars were not transubstantial with those practices, and did not, for instance, involve the ritualized maiming of people for failing to honor the demands of an occupying force. The contemporary expression of such force is more economic than royal or national, though certain nation-states prosper greatly while countries like Bolivia continue to struggle. To such distinctions we should also add the most obvious, geographical discrepancy: for although Cochabamba constitutes an inexpensive option for producing

the picture, it differs dramatically from the areas where Columbus made his expeditions. Bollann emphasizes the problem by having Marna, the young woman hired to make a behind-the-scenes documentary of Costa and Sebastibn's production, question her employer's choice of venue: "We're in Bolivia. It doesn't make much sense. 7,500 feet above sea level, surrounded by mountains, and thousands of miles from the Caribbean. Sebastibn echoes Marna's critique, playfully blaming Costa for privileging budgetary considerations over historical accuracy. Costa explains that if money were the primary concern, they would have shot the movie in English—to which Sebastibn retorts, "Spaniards speak Spanish. Even as Sebastibn affirms Marna's position, however, she insists on linguistic divisions that neither he nor his film acknowledges. "So Spaniards speak Spanish, she interjects with amusement, "and the Tannos that Columbus found speak Quechua?"⁶

Costa finds Marna's critique unimpressive, as his orientation as film-producer predisposes him toward realizing Sebastibn's vision with the least possible expense. His managerial perspective attains clarity in a metafilmic moment that precedes the scene of taxation and punishment, as he recounts during a phone conversation the advantages of working in Cochabamba. "Fucking great, man. It's cheaper to get a man to sit on a light stand than to buy a sandbag, he says. "Two fucking dollars a day and they feel like kings. Throw in some water pumps and give them some old trucks when you're done and *¡listo!* [ready!], two hundred fucking extras. He delivers the soliloquy within earshot of Daniel, a would-be extra whose intensity on- and offset catches Sebastibn's attention and wins him the role of Hatuey, the Arawak chief who helps lead a revolt against the Spanish invasion. Although Costa's monologue dominates the scene in aural terms, the camera mostly concentrates on Daniel's reaction, featuring his face in medium close-up and keeping him in focus as Costa makes his call in the blurred background. Given that the call transpires in English, he presumes that Daniel will not understand. Once Costa finishes the conversation he approaches his actor with Spanish words of congratulations for the scenes shot thus far. Daniel responds—in English—"Fucking great, man before explaining in Spanish that "I worked in the States for two years in construction. I know the story. Having heard Costa reduce his coworkers to sandbags, and realizing the insincerity of the various forms of payment given to the Cochabamban community, he is in no mood for hollow compliments. Working in the US taught him both the English he would need to recognize Costa's insult and the tendency for foreign management to treat his people as interchangeable objects.

By situating concerns about film labor alongside the taxation scene, Bollann broadens the correspondence between gold and water so that it includes Sebastibn's movie. Coding film as yet another substance permeated by hierarchical social relations, *Even the Rain* addresses an issue that has received limited attention in the scholarly study of cinema and in movies themselves. Danae Clark specifies this inattention in *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors' Labor*, encouraging scholars to consider moving pictures as commodities in the Marxian sense, and thus as "quantities of congealed labour time (83). Such consideration constitutes a break with conventional film criticism, which tends to highlight the relationship between image and spectator rather than the work of making movies. Although she praises Richard Dyer's investigations of the star system, she regards his orientation as complicit with the forms of corporate Capitalist ideology that obscure the work of people further down the compensation ladder (xii). Taking inspiration from Murray Ross's *Stars and Strikes*, Clark reorients readers toward the efforts of film extras, who tend to comprise the largest percentage of actor labor (19). She admits that such labor is difficult to examine given its often "sporadic and "undocumented character but she also suggests that without creative efforts to address the problem, the study of film will likely persist in its attention to consumption of movies while maintaining a thin view of their production (5).

Despite the force of her analysis, there is no need to cordon off film labor from audience engagement, as they both contribute to what Clark describes as the "'work' of cultural (re)production.⁷ *Even the Rain* encourages us to bridge those modes of analysis by fostering audience identification with the film's self-consciousness about working conditions onset. Antun, the veteran actor who plays Columbus, embodies that reflexive appeal. After watching rushes of the taxation scene, he praises Daniel's daughter Belyn for her harrowing performance in Sebastibn's picture, hoping aloud that Costa is paying what her acting is worth. She responds with pride that she receives "a lot more than the extras. Antun makes a show of being impressed and then tells her that he will make two million bolivianos, or approximately three hundred thousand dollars, for his part in the film. Without mockery or malice, he attempts to alter her orientation toward movie-making by briefly describing the stark inequalities of power and pay that it involves. The same person who helps bring Sebastibn's vision of systematized exploitation to the screen shows a cunning awareness of his own participation in such a system, and takes multiple opportunities to orient the crew toward the paradox in which they are caught. Although Antun's alco-

holism tends to muddy his perspective, he proves attuned to the material and historical homologies that arise while filming the Columbus biopic in Cochabamba. To identify with Antún is not merely to have a sympathetic reaction to a fictional persona but to experience, in Perez's sense, a convergence of ideologies once presumed discrete. As the upcoming section will show, some viewers refuse that convergence, resisting identification not just with characters but also with what Amy Villarejo describes as the film's "project. For such viewers, the project of demonstrating consubstantiality across epochs looks too much like conflation.



Figure 2. Antón watches himself play Columbus during a screening of the rushes. Copyright Morena Films, 2010.

Like a Dream

Bollann's daring rhetorical strategy generates multiple objections, though the present section focuses on just two. One concerns the ethics of history, the other the ethics of work. To say that *Even the Rain* is susceptible to such critiques or that it withstands them is to miss the complexity of the film's rhetorical appeal. Bollann anticipates the resistance, attributes to it a certain validity, and in quiet ways, incorporates it into her argument. That argument hints at her discomfiting complicity with the very power relations she challenges; further, it implicates us in its tapestry of object associations. For no matter how vigorously we try to maintain a critical orientation toward the modes of identification the film depicts, she insinuates our immersion in the systems of privilege and oppression *Even the Rain* calls to mind. Rather than a polemic that purports to elude the vast reach of neoliberal economics, the picture enacts a form of inquiry that aims to historicize that reach, to juxtapose synchronic and diachronic modes of indigenous ex-

ploitation, and to stage a dialogue with perspectives that question the movie's ethical grounding.⁸

The first objection to Bollann's project concerns the narrative as a whole, though it typically concentrates on just one scene. The scene begins inside Sebastibn's movie as Spanish soldiers round up dissident Arawaks for punishment. As the soldiers tie the men to crosses, the camera lingers on Hatuey/Daniel, who refuses a final blessing from an attending priest, proclaiming hatred for the Spanish god and Spanish greed just as his captors light the pyre at his feet. The community of enslaved Indians then chants "Hatuey! as he and twelve others slowly burn alive. The next shot focuses on Sebastibn whisper-chanting Hatuey's name on a hillside overlooking the action. After an interval in which his voice mingles with those of the extras, he calls "Cut! and applauds his crew. As Daniel and the other actors disentangle themselves from their crosses, a police vehicle arrives on the scene. Officers apprehend Daniel and prepare to transport him to prison as punishment for participating in the Bolivian water protests. But before the police can leave, the extras surround the vehicle. Wearing Arawak clothing, they flip the car and free Daniel from his captors. As the police emerge with guns drawn, Costa and Sebastibn intervene to protect their investment. While Costa attempts to defuse the tension, a few extras surprise the officers by seizing their weapons, allowing Daniel to escape into the forest alongside a group of actor-activists. Dazzled by the "confluence of temporalities, and the speed with which the circumference of indigenous resistance expands before his eyes, Sebastibn speaks once more in the reverent tones with which he chanted Hatuey's name: "It's like a dream, he says to Costa.



Figure 3. Costa (right of center) and Sebastián (rear left) attempt to mediate as a policeman points his weapon at the indigenous extras. Those extras refuse to let the officers take Daniel/Hatuey to jail for his participation in the water wars. Copyright Morena Films, 2010.

When the extras come to Daniel's aid, they do so not merely to defend the movie but to safeguard a leader in the fight against price hikes in public utilities. While fusing narrative layers as powerfully as any sequence in the picture, the scene designates in concentrated ways the identification of gold, water, and film, as Daniel comes to embody and resist the relations of exploitation embedded in each substance. Despite the summative character of the scene, some reviewers object to what they see as *Even the Rain*'s narrative contrivance. Comparing Columbus-era atrocities to contemporary practices of corporate greed, or worse yet, the vicissitudes of filmmaking, seems to such viewers facile and reductive. Whereas Burke argues that any vocabulary for representing a phenomenon involves a necessary reduction, a coding of one thing in terms of another (*Grammar* 96), some terministic screens provoke controversy insofar as they elide historical distinctions. Dismissing the movie's "obvious parallelism (Schenker) and "earnest didacticism (Wheeler 246), critics oppose using the idea of imperialism to equate vastly different modes of exploitation. From such a skeptical perspective, Sebastibn's assertion of the dream-like quality of Daniel's escape looks especially suspect. If it signals the realization of Sebastibn's fantasy, it clumsily illustrates his narcissism. If it connotes his surprise and disbelief, it suggests his obliviousness to parallels that critics like Schenker find all too obvious.

There is, however, another way to read the line that identifies Bollann with her fictional director. Rather than expressing Sebastibn's good fortune or bafflement, it may imply an awareness of the artificiality of the historical overlap. Given *Even the Rain*'s orientation toward the politics of film production, it may be that Sebastibn lets slip not only his own anxiety about historical ethics but Bollann's as well. To say that the intermingling of histories is like a dream is to reject their interchangeability, to assert the ambiguity of their substantial connection. Without breaking the narrative spell, the line acknowledges that the very train of object associations she has worked so hard to create is an evanescent projection, a multimodal fashioning of conceptual unity out of raw contingency and irreducible singularity.

But even if Bollann's self-consciousness helps deflect the charge that she conflates disparate events, concerns about the division of labor on her set remain to be addressed. Duncan Wheeler, who makes known his suspi-

cions of the film's pedagogical "neatness, also raises concerns about the material conditions of its production, holding that "any genuinely ethical appraisal of the film would have to look at concrete information about the treatment and payment of the indigenous cast and crew, examining how the Bolivian extras were treated (251). In a brief note at the end of his chapter, Wheeler cites Bollann's claim to have paid the extras twenty dollars a day for their work on the film (253). Unaware of Bollann's disclosures about actor compensation, Roger Ebert states bluntly that he "looked in vain for a credit saying, 'No extras were underpaid in the making of this film.' It seems that the subject matter of *Even the Rain* invites an assessment criterion that rarely if ever figures into film reviews—and, as Clark shows in *Negotiating Hollywood*, one that receives little attention in the history of film scholarship. And what's more, that assessment criterion becomes the Burkean God-principle by which to determine the ethics of the film's project. For such critics and reviewers, insofar as the scope of *Even the Rain*'s critique of labor conditions expands to include the metafilm itself, the ethos of the metafilm crumbles.

But Bollann's film never purports to embody a singular solution to the multiple problems it poses. Instead, it investigates the intersectionality of those problems, showing the critique of indigenous labor exploitation to have an elastic circumference, which frequently stretches to subsume those who level the critique at others. Such an investigation does not suggest, however, the equivalence of each instance of such exploitation, nor does it indicate Bollann's concession to presumed inevitability. In an interview with DP/30 about the production of *Even the Rain*, she claims to improve on the practices of her fictional filmmakers, yet remains uncertain about the extent of those improvements. While directing, she was conscious of differences in pay between actors, between Mexican and Spanish crewmembers, and between participants from Argentina and Bolivia, acknowledging that the distinctions held potential to create "classes on the set (DP/30). Such class formations, she notes, are "very ugly. While doing her utmost to support a spirit of shared purpose and mutual respect among workers, she found refreshing the requests of some Cochabamban participants not for individualized payment but for community enrichment. They wanted bricks and computers for their schools, basketball goals, trucks for transporting water, and direct payment to families for using their land while filming (DP/30; Vitagraph). Bollann and producer Juan Gordon accommodated such requests whenever possible, although she admits the likely imperfection of the result, saying that some people in the community may be "an-

noyed with us. *Even the Rain*'s intertexts stress the film's inability to solve the problems it poses, suggesting that the ethical tensions that infused the production process also linger after the movie's release.

The interviews highlight the ambiguous relationship between Bollann's metafilm and the interior movie, hinting that however critical she is of the biopic, it is substantially one with her own text. And here we must remember that substance, for Burke, designates the identity of a thing while gesturing toward its contextual basis, subverting the border between figure and ground. Once we acknowledge the ambiguity of substance that links Bollann's and Sebastibn's projects, her narrative depictions of filmmaking take on a disquieting quality. When we return, for example, to Costa's observation that it only takes water pumps and old trucks to buy "two hundred fucking extras, we may hear Bollann questioning whether her own offering of trucks, bricks, and school materials to Cochabamban workers constitutes just payment. Granted, such payments came in direct response to local requests, but the worry remains that fulfilling those requests provides a cheap, convenient means to achieve grand cinematic scale. While we may, with momentary safety, distinguish between the producer who compares employees to sandbags and the director who dramatizes those attitudes, *Even the Rain* establishes a troubled identification between inter- and extradiegetic rhetors. That mode of identification becomes all the clearer when we learn of Bollann's concerns about classes forming on the set. While her description of those concerns helps disclose the material and political conditions of the film's production, it also provides a filter for interpreting the scene in which Antun alerts Belyn to pay discrepancies between the extras, characteractors, and leads. In the ironic sequence that finds "Columbus pointing out the injustice of naturalized inequality, we recognize an ugliness that Bollann strives with limited success to avoid. As the Columbus-figure voices disapproval of Costa's production, he accentuates the condition wherein the object of censure turns the analytical lens on the critic.

As the identification of gold, water, and film reaches outside the primary diegesis to include Bollann's text, it brings into question situations wherein resource-rich filmmakers attempt to raise awareness of injustices in contexts distant from their own. For all Sebastibn's anti-imperialist sentiments, he proves doggedly oriented toward completing his project rather than ensuring the well-being of his actors. And Costa, though he becomes increasingly sensitive to the plight of Daniel and Belyn, cannot commit to the long, dangerous project of supporting their struggle for water rights.

Admittedly, he helps save Belyn during the demonstrations, and he later expresses deep respect for her father along with regret about having to leave the country. But he leaves the country nonetheless, and only after intimating to Daniel that he will not return. During the taxi-ride to the airport, he opens a gift from Daniel—a lovingly wrapped vial of water—and gazes into the Cochabamban streets as the ordinary bustle of commerce supplants the drama of the protests. We share his perspective as the city and its people fade. Although his shift in orientation reverses that of Sebastibn by moving from self-concern to compassionate action, the conjoining of verbal and visual rhetoric at the movie’s conclusion suggests that such compassion does not last: Costa and Daniel say not temporary but final goodbyes; the image of the city flickers and decomposes, giving way to darkness.

Even the Rain thus contends that the activism of well-meaning outsiders all too often proves fickle. But if the movie were merely an elaborate expression of *mea culpa*, it would hold limited interest, embodying the self-fulfilling rhetoric that declares intractable the very problems it articulates. Bollann’s movie suggests that those problems will not be resolved by cinematic narrative, and that they require dedicated, long-term attention rather than one-time address. The film may insinuate our consubstantiality with Costa, but assertions of shared substance, as Burke reminds us, occur within conditions of intersubjective difference. How, then, can we amplify such difference? How can we insist on the ambiguity of “substance—a term that vacillates between identity and exteriority—and thus demonstrate that even as Bollann’s portrait of abandonment interpellates us, the correspondence is neither total nor inevitable? Whatever our answers to those questions, our engagement with *Even the Rain* clarifies a profound if frequently overlooked dimension of metafilmic rhetoric: the inward turn reflects not solipsism but a counterintuitive and even ironic summons to grapple with material circumstances that exceed the cinematic frame.

Notes

1. See Latour, page 10. Bill Brown cites the same passage in “Thing Theory, though he designates “thing as a more capacious concept than “object (3). As likely to be an idea as a concrete artifact, the signifier “thing fuses loose generality with the ostensible precision of tangible materiality. The tension between vagueness and the desire for certitude often commands our attention, Brown observes, when objects “stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily (4). Although this es-

say focuses on the consubstantiality of what Brown calls objects, it also concerns the thing-ness of varied valued substances—the way they cloud the border between presumably reliable physicality and ticklish abstraction.

2. Bollann's partner Paul Laverty wrote the screenplay for *Even the Rain*. He meant it to be the first in a series of pictures based on Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, all of which were to be period films tied to specific chapters. When the plans for that series collapsed, he kept working on the initial chapter and added the metafilmic layering that included the fictional filmmakers and the Cochabamba water wars (DP/30).

3. Perez derives these definitions from Smith's "Altered States: Character and Emotional Response in Cinema.

4. See *Grammar* (77-85) for a discussion of how changing the location or spatial circumference in which an act unfolds may change actors' (or audiences') interpretation of that act, along with the language they use to describe it.

5. The riot squads fired tear gas into crowds of dissenters, attacked people who refused to leave, and one army officer killed the student Victor Hugo Daza with a rifle shot to the face (Assies 29-30, Finnegan).

6. Clark draws here on Raymond Williams's Marxism and Literature, hinting that interpretation is itself a form of work. Yet too much of that interpretation, she argues, "occurs without an accompanying theory of labor (14).

7. Many thanks to an anonymous reviewer at *KB Journal* for describing *Even the Rain* as a form of rhetorical inquiry.

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